

Ecosystem Committee Minutes

Wednesday, August 22, 2007 1pm-4pm
2nd Floor Conference Room, Ted Stevens Marine Research Institute, Juneau, AK

Committee: Stephanie Madsen (chair), David Benton, Jon Kurland, Jim Ayers (teleconference), Diana Evans (staff), Chris Oliver (staff), Bill Wilson (staff)

Others participating included: Joe McCabe, Lauren Smoker, Melanie Brown, Lew Quierolo, Chris Krenz, Jon Warrenchuk

The Ecosystem Committee discussed the three items on their agenda. The next Committee meeting is targeted to occur between the October and December Council meetings, tentatively during the first week of November, 2007.

Arctic FMP

Mr Wilson introduced the Council's June 2007 motion to develop an Arctic FMP that generally closes all waters north of the Bering Strait to commercial fishing, and the Council's charge to the Ecosystem Committee to help staff develop the FMP. Mr Wilson discussed his work plan for this project, including the timeline and approach, and a draft outline of the FMP. Mr Wilson also presented a community outreach plan for the project, prepared by Ms Nicole Kimball (Council staff), and some informational material on the Arctic.

With regard to the workplan, Mr Wilson had flagged certain issues as needing further clarification, which the Committee addressed. Consequently, **the Committee makes the following recommendations to the Council:**

- **That the document under development be called an Arctic Fishery Management Plan.** The motion refers to an Arctic Marine Resources FMP, but the Committee believes this may be confusing as the Council would not be regulating seabird or marine mammal harvests. The document should clarify that the Council adopts the Magnuson-Stevens Act definitions of 'fish' and 'fishery', which clearly exclude marine mammals and birds.
- **That final action on the Arctic FMP be targeted for June 2008**, in accordance with the timeline drafted by staff.
- **That Arctic fishery management proceed in a stepwise progression. The Council's first step would be expeditious implementation of an Arctic FMP that is simple and straightforward. The conditions under which fisheries might be permitted in the future, and their management, would be addressed at a later stage.** Although the FMP must include the contents required by the Magnuson-Stevens Act, it need only contain the essential elements of what is required to close the area to commercial fishing (subject to the Council's options). To the extent that it is consistent with rapid implementation, the FMP may also describe the process the Council would use, at a future time, to determine the conditions under which fisheries may be opened: how will the Council involve stakeholders and communities to decide the criteria for what, when, where, and how fisheries may open, and who may participate. The actualization of this process would be the Council's second step in Arctic fishery management.
- **That the Ecosystem Committee continue to oversee the development of the Arctic FMP.** The Committee appreciates the opportunity to stay involved in the development of the document, and would continue to interact with Mr Wilson and the staff-level analytical team identified in the work plan. **The Committee recommends that the appointment of an Arctic FMP planning team be deferred until after the implementation of the FMP, at such time when the Council is considering the conditions under which fishing might be allowed.**

The Committee agrees generally with the approach presented in the work plan. Only a limited economic analysis may be required to support this action, as prohibiting the commercial fisheries effectively has no practical impact. The sociocultural analysis, describing the subsistence fabric of life in the Arctic region, will be an important backdrop for the Council's action. A thorough discussion of marine mammals, waterfowl, and seabirds should be included in the analysis. Additionally, the scallop and crab Plan Teams should be advised of the Council's intent to truncate the FMP management areas at Bering Strait, and solicited for feedback and a more definitive description of the red king crab fishery in the southern Chukchi Sea.

Regarding community outreach, **the Committee approves of the proposed Community Outreach Plan, as presented by staff, but recommends to the Council the following changes:**

- **That staff postpone sending letters to each entity (villages, community governments, etc.), and instead begin with telephone contact with key people at the regional level.** Sending an official letter without prior personal contact may be misunderstood, and first initiating some basic conversation is more likely to be effective. Organizations to begin with include the North Slope Borough, the Northwest Arctic Borough, the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission, the Eskimo Walrus Commission, Maniilaq, and Kawerak. Staff can discuss with these organizations how further communications should proceed, and solicit their recommendations as to how to get the word out. Telephone conversations should then be followed up with a letter.
- **That staff identify events or forums at which to do outreach.** For example, the Council may consider staffing a booth at the upcoming Alaska Federation of Natives annual meeting, to distribute information or answer questions. The Council has also been invited to give a presentation at the Arctic Research Commission meeting in Nome this October.
- **That the Council respond formally to those entities who have sent letters regarding the Arctic FMP.**

The Committee also discussed Senate Joint Resolution 17, submitted by Senator Stevens on August 3, 2007. This resolution proposes that the US should, as a matter of policy, support efforts to halt commercial fishing in the high seas of the Arctic Ocean, until international agreements to manage migratory, transboundary, and straddling Arctic fish stocks are in place. This resolution, if it passes, would effectively extend to international waters the Council's proposed action in US Arctic waters, namely to halt fishing until such time as an appropriate management framework, supported by adequate scientific knowledge, is in place.

Aleutian Islands Fishery Ecosystem Plan

The Committee received a draft of the 'glossy' synthesis pamphlet of the AI FEP to review, and will individually provide comments back to Ms Evans. Ms Evans suggested that the distribution date for the pamphlet be pushed back beyond the targeted October 1st deadline, which would allow more time for review (by the Committee and others). The Committee inquired about the distribution plan for the pamphlet, and agreed to discuss this further at their next meeting.

One of the suggestions of the FEP is for the Council to further develop the concept of 'ecosystem health'. At their last meeting, the Committee offered to begin this task, and the Council agreed. Consequently, the Committee asks staff to draft a discussion paper outlining an approach to defining ecosystem health, or as a first step, desirable or undesirable states of the ecosystem. The Committee suggests consulting with the AI Ecosystem Team, and refers staff to the academic literature and any other fishery management practitioners who may be tackling these issues. The Committee will review the discussion paper at their next meeting.

Other updates

Alaska Marine Ecosystem Forum

Ms Evans and Ms Madsen provided a brief update on the July meeting of the Alaska Marine Ecosystem Forum, the Federal-State regional collaboration on marine ecosystem issues, of which the Council is a member. One question raised at the Forum is that there are a number of Federal-State collaborations in Alaska, and some thought may need to be given to how they interact with each other. A Committee member also suggested that thought needs to be given to how the public can provide input to these collaborations.

NOAA's Integrated Ecosystem Assessments

NOAA is planning to conduct an Integrated Ecosystem Assessment (IEA) in Alaska in 2010, for which fiscal planning is currently underway. The IEA is intended to contain the information necessary to understand the inter-relationship between resource management decisions and the changing state of an ecosystem. Three regional ecosystems have been identified for pilot studies: the California Current, Alaska, and the Northeast US. **The Committee recommends that the Council should request a presentation from NOAA on its plans for an Integrated Ecosystem Assessment in Alaska in 2010, and specific clarification regarding the Council's role in this project.** Unless otherwise directed, the Ecosystem Committee will continue to track the agency's progress with IEAs.

NOAA's Alaska Regional Collaboration Team (ARCTic)

Throughout the nation, NOAA has established regional collaboration teams that cut across NOAA line offices. These bring together NOAA employees working in a particular region, with the goal to improve NOAA's productivity and value to customers. The Alaska team is currently developing an integrated services plan, which will assess current NOAA services in the Alaska region, and develop an approach for product and service enhancements, in concert with key partners and stakeholders. The Council has been asked to participate in the development of this assessment, as a NOAA partner. More information on regional collaboration is available at: http://www.ppi.noaa.gov/regional_collaboration.htm.